



COMPLEX PROJECTS

BEYOND THE WALLS

– Rehabilitation through education



INTRO

One third of the fortune 500 companies in the Midwest are in Chicago. These companies contribute over \$443 billion of revenues to the economy. Until 2005 Chicago O'Hare airport was the busiest airport in the world. But in recent years Chicago seems to be struggling, like many American cities. Chicago is becoming polarized and segregated: the gap between rich and poor is widening; crime, drug abuse, and murder rates are rising. Many factories and companies are bankrupt and underemployment is undermining the economy. Of the 15 largest cities in the USA Chicago is the only city that its population was declining. As a result, hundreds of schools have been shut down. Gangs are becoming more and more powerful. Foreclosures rates have increased 22% in the last ten years, and the city is almost bankrupt by one of the most underfunded pensions in the USA.

The West side of the city is especially interesting to study. Just 10 years ago it was expected to be the next up and coming place to settle due to several attractive characteristics and proximity to the center. But due to the financial crisis and the stalled construction industry this area has stagnated and has become a vague terrain of under used potentials and urban decay that countless American cities are experiencing at the moment.

(Source: COMPLEX PROJECTS TU DELFT 2014, CHICAGO: GROWTH, DECLINE & AMERICAN INNOVATION)

- The relationship between research and design

The perspective of the Complex Projects studio starts from a broad urban analysis (regional scale, sometimes even national scale). From there, you move through each subsequent scale on many different topics in order to get a complete overview of the design site. From this urban analysis on multiple scales, investigating social, economic and political circumstances, a problem statement is derived. The Garfield Park community is damaged by unemployment, poverty, segregation, high crime rates and high incarceration rates.

Especially in the West Side of Chicago, where the Garfield Park neighborhood is situated, crime rates remain high, mostly due to recidivism of ex-offenders, who thus keep getting in and out of prison. 70% of males from this part of Chicago have been incarcerated, 68% of state inmates did not receive a high school diploma. Causes of recidivism are complex and depend on many aspects, such as insufficient finances and skills to find a job, a criminal record, not enough support from family and friends and low self-esteem. The underlying cause is that current education is insufficient: there is a big gap between education and the matching job market. This makes the community vulnerable, the family structure and the social fabric are weak and deconstructed.

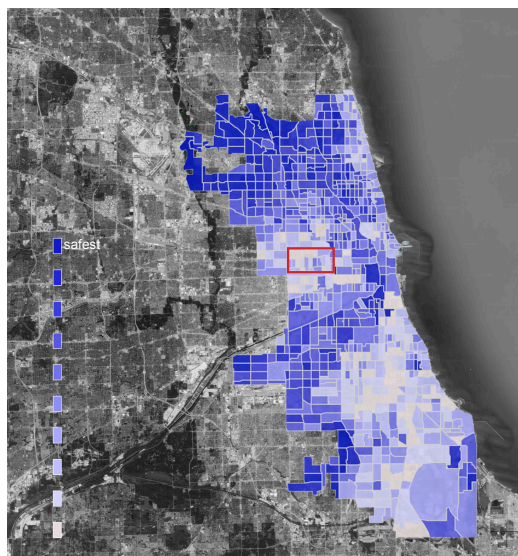


Fig 1. Crime rates neighborhoods

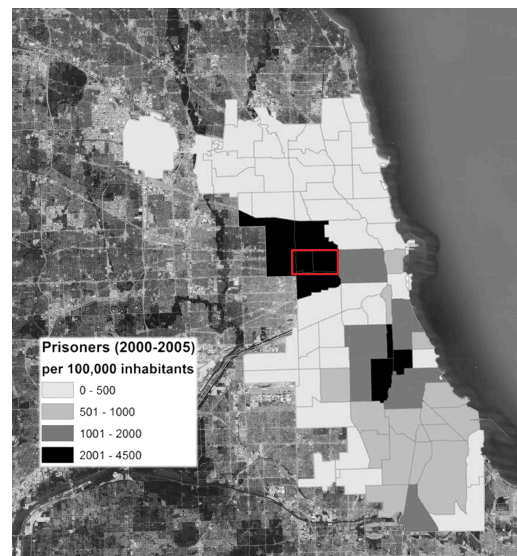


Fig 2. Incarceration rates

The object to be designed is a prison, or more precisely, a rehabilitation center to prevent recidivism. The new prison in the Garfield Park neighborhood is to become a small-scale prison that is providing higher education to every inmate. An example for this project is the Sing Sing correctional center in NY states. In that facility, a small group of inmates has access to higher education. Most of the graduated inmates don't return after release. Unlike most prisons in the US, Garfield Park prison is located in a residential area. 'Normal' residents are living in the direct surroundings. A prison with high fences won't do any good for the neighborhood; on the other hand, the inhabitants don't want to have inmates in their backyard too. Even the inmates don't benefit from living inside high walls and being isolated in their rehabilitation process.

- The relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject/case study chosen by the student within this framework (location/object)

The multi-scale research is based on the following topics: Demographics; Identity; Typomorphology; Mobility; Segregation; Crime; Education; Economy; Sustainability; Community; and Experience. The topic I chose to focus on was Crime and the conclusion was that the high crime rates could hardly be reduced due to the high recidivism rate. The aim of the design was to reduce the recidivism rates in the neighborhood through providing education in prison.

For the case study, I have looked at modern prisons in The Netherlands and Norway, because the recidivism rate is relatively low in these countries. In general, there is more space, light, education and activities provided in these prisons and more contact with the outside world is allowed.

- The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by the student in this framework

The research method of the graduation lab is based on a selection of individual topics and layers. Each layer has its own chapter dedicated to it, each of which ends in a singular conclusion. At the very end, these conclusions are brought together to form a general conclusion. But it doesn't stop there. Where the chapters end, design starts.

Before zooming into the individual and detailed design object, we (a group of four students) developed an urban strategy that followed a master plan for the neighborhood by combining four different topics, in this case: education, community, segregation and crime. We located the most problematic areas of the neighborhood and then identified these areas by different characters (areas of recreation, culture, commerce, residence and work), developing and improving the specific features such "complementary places" possess. Intervention notes were created in order to fight recidivism and to bind the community. One of these notes was then chosen to create a master plan for the individual designs.

- The relationship between the project and the wider social context

The recidivism issue is not simply a local problem in Garfield Park or Chicago. This also applies in the whole country. According to Bureau of Justice, 68% of prisoners were rearrested for a new crime within 3 years after being released and 77% were rearrested within 5 years. Research has shown that ex-inmates who obtained employment tend to have lower rates of recidivism. Ex-inmates who can find a job are less likely to commit crime again than those who cannot: any kind of work helps. Lack of education makes ex-inmates only qualifiable for low-skill, low-wage employment, if not unemployment. It is also proven that providing higher education in prison can reduce recidivism: ex-offenders who earn an Associate's degree have a 10% recidivism rate; those who earn a Bachelor's degree have a 5% recidivism rate; and earning Master's degree can even reduce the recidivism rate to 1%. The cost of educating a student per year is lower than incarcerating a prisoner.